

# The Pueblo Wrong-Guessers Are Still Safe in Port

By TED LEWIS

Washington, May 7—The biggest mouthful uttered by Navy Secretary John H. Chafee in connection with his "no censure" decision in the Pueblo spy ship case was in response to a question as to what part the public attitude played in his verdict.

"A tough question to answer," said Chafee, who has a well trained ear for grassroots voices, having been governor of Rhode Island.

It is not too tough a question to answer when outside the Pentagon bureaucracy and looking in. Due in considerable part to the efforts of the loyal determined wife of the Pueblo skipper, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, there had been fired up a popular interest in whether he was going to get a fair shake, or be the singled-out scapegoat while the higher brass that okayed the Pueblo mission wouldn't even get a stupid mark in the record book.

And in Congress today there was general agreement that Chafee's decision was politically well tailored to public requirements, as it had been hoped it would. Nobody was going to be court-martialed and nobody censured.

## But How About the Admiral?

As a political decision it was considered admirable. If Chafee had decided that the Bucher court-martial recommendation of the Navy board of inquiry should be carried out, he could scarcely fail to approve the other proposals, including a "letter of reprimand" for Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, commander of naval forces in Japan when the ship was lost.

Figure out how that sort of final action by the Navy secretary would have



Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher and wife.

sat with the Bucher partisans—convincing them that Navy justice dispensed wrist slaps to the big brass in the chain of command and a career-ending punch to the skipper in charge of the mission they approved.

That course happily was not followed. In the aftermath of Chafee's rendering of his middle-of-the-road kind of justice, we have the interesting kid-glove handling of Bucher. He is being assigned to the Navy's postgraduate school at Monterey, Calif., to work for a master's degree in management and he

Yet Bucher's future in the Navy as a career has nothing to do with whether he gets an M.A. in management but all to do with his Pueblo past and Mrs. Bucher's taking on the Navy establishment in his behalf. No Navy wife who wants her husband to get ahead rouses the rabble. It simple isn't done.

We also should point out that a Navy captain, should he run the battleship he is in charge of onto a mud flat in New York Harbor, has lost his chance of ever being an admiral and knows it. His obsolete vessel's engines may have failed, causing the ship to get stuck in the mud, but it was all his fault nevertheless. How could Bucher, considering what happened to the Pueblo, expect any better luck.

Now, it is very different with such characters in the Pueblo case as Adm. Johnson. Once in the top echelon, there is comparative safety. Traditionally, those who are up there instinctively try to protect the whole brass fraternity. If there is an error of judgment everybody in the "chain of command" was to blame a little, and no individual too much.

The nation is probably going to have to live with this cover-up technique. An old tub of a cargo ship became the Pueblo. It was sent on a dangerous mission regardless. It was loaded down with ultra-secret spying contrivances but not with the proper guns to defend itself. There was failure to anticipate an emergency because our best Navy minds had read international law books which explained how a sovereign ship on the high seas in peacetime was as safe as in home harbor.

## A Rap to Be Passed On

Isn't it wonderful to be told by Secretary Chafee that not individuals precisely but "the chain of command" plus the "control and support structure" just had to take the rap for a lot of what went wrong?

There is even a Congressional tieup in this structure and chain. If Congress would only give the Navy enough money, spy ships would no longer have to be eaky makeshifts incapable of mounting a three-inch gun without floundering.

It doesn't take much courage to attack the "chain of command." No one in authority along the chain would dare

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it back, because to do so would disclose his identity and his acceptance of some responsibility.

But the authoritative magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology has come out with a blistering editorial about the chain that is worth repeating:

"The performance of this chain of command (in the recent EC-121 spy plane loss off North Korea) was just as futile as that of the Johnson administration in the Pueblo case," comments the magazine. But while this periodical has Pentagon contacts that can produce the names in the chain, it knows very well that to name names would put it on the establishment's black list.

## High Places Are Protected

The record needs to show that in high places in government, including the White House, the top men in the chain, which includes an added intelligence (CIA) link occasionally, are similarly protected.

What is happening now in the Pueblo case and the spy plane case is nothing really new. Remember the protective cloak thrown around the wrong guessers in the Bay of Pigs fiasco? John F. Kennedy took the blame himself. He didn't even try to share it with Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer or CIA chief Allen Dulles, the two biggest alleged experts he had relied on.

Lemnitzer went on to the top Nato assignment in Paris. Dulles held to his own chain of command post in the CIA. And neither ever publicly revealed individual responsibility for the horrific foulup. Had they done so, they would have violated the anonymity requirements of the chain of command.